

Society's Views on "The Social Construction of Gender" and "Racial Formation"

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Throughout time society has managed to train our minds and has made us categorize human beings in different ways. We view people differently when it comes to both gender and race. Gender is when society constructs expectations that are considered appropriate for a male or female and race is a system we categorize people in depending on what their culture, ethnic, or geographical affiliation is. "The social construction of gender" is a process that society trains people to view gender a certain way. "Racial formation" is a theory that explains how we view race in our structured society and how it has changed throughout time. Both of these concepts have similarities and differences that affect us and the way our society is constructed. The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the article "Night to His Day" by Judith Lorber and Michael Omi and Howard Winant's article "Racial Formation in the United States".

One of the similarities between "the social construction of gender" and "racial formation" is that people tend to judge a person's gender or race by the way they look. Lorber states that "Gender, like culture, is a human production that depends on everyone constantly "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman)" (54). When we see a person we usually look at what they are wearing or how their hairstyle is in order to determine whether they are male or a female. Looking at these features helps us because we have been trained to know what a man or a woman is supposed to look like. A man typically has short hair, facial hair, loose pants, loose shirt, sneakers, and is able to wear baseball caps, while a woman typically has long hair, wears makeup, skirts, dresses, or tight pants, fitted shirts, and wears heels. Race is also judged by looks because according to Omi and Winant we quickly tend to define white identity as "American" and categorize anyone else who has colored skin to be foreign even if they were initially born in the United States. When looking at a light-skinned, blonde hair and blue eyed person we quickly think that they are American and when we see a person of color we assume that they come from another country. We do not take time to realize that there are light-skinned, blonde hair and blue eyed people in other parts in the world and we also fail to realize that dark-skinned people or people of color in general are also American.

In both "the social construction of gender" and "racial formation" there are superior categories of people. Society has taught us that men are the ones who tend to be superior to women. Lorber says, "Within many social groups, however, men are advantaged over women" (61). Men tend to be viewed as the dominant gender compared to women. Men are seen as stronger, smarter, and more successful than women. In our society we are used to seeing strong men doing difficult jobs that involve a lot of labor or having a degree and living a successful life, but when we see a woman doing these things it is considered taboo. A woman is viewed as more of a gentle, loving, and weak human being, which is what differentiates her from a man. In reality there is no true difference between a man and a woman, aside from their biological features. A woman is able to do whatever a man is able to do and their gender does not determine what they are capable of doing. Race is also categorized. Omi and Winant restate Jefferson from the Enlightenment doctrine, they argue that, "the blacks, [are] originally a different race, or made distinct by time and circumstances are inferior to whites" (64). We have been trained to believe

that Caucasian people are the superior race due to historical events that happened between the Europeans and the Native Americans. The Europeans used to believe that since they were light-skinned and had superior weapons, that they were superior to a different colored race that looked nothing like them. Their idea of superiority and categorization of people has impacted our lives ever since. We tend to categorize someone as more superior than the rest of the group because of their racial background or gender since we are used to someone being more dominant.

Although there are many similarities, there are also differences between these two concepts. One difference is that gender has more of a biological basis because people believe it derives from sex, while race is not. Lorber explains that “For the individual, gender construction starts with assignment to a sex category on the basis of what the genitalia look like at birth” (55). A person is born a male or a female due to their genitalia and is categorized off of it throughout their whole lives. Omi and Winant realize that a lot of people tend to think that race is actually biological and argue that, “As a result of prior efforts and struggles, we have now reached the point of fairly general agreement that race is not a biologically given but rather a socially constructed way of differing human beings” (65). In reality race is not something you are born with and it does not determine your characteristics as an individual. We can tell whether a person is a male or a female because of their genitals and physical features but we cannot determine what race someone is by doing this. There are no physical characteristics that determine your race.

Another difference between them is that Lorber sees gender in a contemporary perspective while Omi and Winant see race in a historical perspective. Lorber writes about ideas that have been recently created. She mentions crossover genders such as transsexuals and transvestites. Transsexuals are biological males and females who have a sex change. This means that they get an operation to change their genitals. Transvestites are males who live and dress like females and females who live and dress up as males. Although they are not institutionalized as the third type of gender, they are new ideas that have been created by people who want to express their new identities. Omi and Winant write an article that is structured with historical content. They inform us of how race categories first began. They talk about how it all began when the Europeans came to America and conquered the Native Americans land. They mention how “the ferocious division of society into Europeans and “Others” soon coalesced” during the conquest. Omi and Winant come to us from the beginning of the United States history in order to demonstrate that “racial formation” is just a historical idea that we keep holding on to.

Society has molded human beings to believe that categorizing one another is the way to live because it is something that has been done throughout history. We do not realize that our views of other people are not truly our own but are influenced by concepts that society has put in our mind. We need to begin to think for ourselves without allowing others' ideas influence our mind with incorrect perspectives.